

Pet Policy and Guidance for Fostering Households

Scope of this Chapter

Nottinghamshire Council recognises that pets can form a valuable part of a foster carer's household and can support looked after children, to form positive relationships within the foster family. However, the paramount consideration is to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child throughout their stay with a foster family, whilst also ensuring that their needs are prioritised in a safe and nurturing environment. Where applicants keep animals the implications for children who are to be placed or placed with carers, will need to be considered as part of the household health and safety assessment.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

- Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (amended 1997)
- Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standard 2011, 4 and Standard 10
- BAAF Practice Note 42, Placing Children with Dog Owning Families
- Adams, P (2015) *Good Practice Guide, Dogs and Pets in Fostering and Adoption*, London, Coram BAAF

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1. Dangerous Pets

Nottinghamshire County Council will not approve, nor assess foster carers, who own any breed of dog listed under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (amended 1997), or where there is a pet which comes under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.

Dogs listed under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (amended 1997) and their descriptions are detailed on the [GOV.UK website](#); as listed below:

1. Pit Bull Terrier.
2. Japanese Tosa.
3. Dogo Argentino.
4. Fila Brasileiro.

2. Assessments

Dogs and other animals can pose as a risk to children. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure as far as possible that the foster placements conform to National Minimum Standards 2011 (4, 10) and that children are safeguarded from potential harm.

A Pet Assessment will be required to be undertaken by a supervising social worker, when there is a request to be considered as a prospective foster carer of a household with pets, or if a new pet is introduced to an existing fostering household. Any change in circumstances regarding pets should be updated at the next foster carer annual review or prior to this, if any matters arise. The supervising social worker will continue to observe any animals during their visits, and it is an expectation that carers inform their supervising social worker of any issues/changes in the behaviour of their pet.

The pet assessment template is available on mosaic and should be completed with the carers/applicants, with it recorded on the applicants/foster carers file. The assessment itself is based around CoramBAAF Dog Assessment Form (2015), derived from the Good Practice Guide, Dogs and Pets in Fostering and Adoption (Adams, 2015). As part of the pet assessment, the supervising social worker should observe the pet within the home and its interactions with others. This will be alongside discussions in respect of the animal's temperament, background, including their access within the home.

Consideration needs to be given to the number of pets in the home and how their needs will be met alongside those of any placed child. This should include the impact of any changes in routine for the pet. For example, the persons who predominately looks after a dog is seen by them as a "pack leader"? This person will need to be responsible for maintaining the dog's routine as far as possible when family life changes as a result of a child being placed.

The breed and size of the dog will also need to be considered, with information available from The Kennel Club to inform as to expectations, though, each dog will need to be assessed as an individual.

Levels of supervision need to be reflective of the children's ages, developmental needs, including any known individual health needs

It is important to be aware of the health risks that can be associated with pets, as any health issues can affect a pet's behaviour. Therefore, all vaccinations should be kept up to date, with vaccination records checked.

In respect of pets, health risks include:

- Cat scratches, bites and litter trays which can cause Toxoplasmosis (see [Toxoplasmosis - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk) for further information), this can be more serious in people with weakened immune systems such as babies and young children.
- Toxocariasis, a parasite that lives inside dogs' bodies and Campylobacter a bacterial infection (see <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/toxocariasis/> for further information).
- Psittacosis, sometimes called Parrot Fever, although relevant to other birds. (See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/psittacosis> for further information)

In order to combat the above, dogs and cats should be wormed and flead regularly, with good hygiene practices in place. Carers should be able to support this with a certificate or

letter from their vet and this should be noted on the Pet/Dog Questionnaire and updated at the foster carer Annual Review. All outside areas should be kept free of fouling.

In all handling of pets, good hygiene practices are key, with pets' cages, enclosures or tanks needing to be kept clean. Cat litter trays should be unable to be accessed by crawling babies/toddlers.

If chickens are kept, they should be secured appropriately, and vet checked.

If carers own horses and there is agreement to the foster child riding these, then an appropriate risk assessment will need to be undertaken.

The above information is not exhaustive in respect of all pets; therefore, assessments will need to be undertaken on an individual basis, with advice sought from appropriate bodies if required. For other animals, Adams (2015) contains useful information regarding assessment considerations.

If there is any doubt about the suitability of an animal, then an expert opinion should be sought via the commission of an assessment completed by a Clinical Animal Behaviouralist. Two quotes will need to be obtained and passed to the FSM for agreement in respect of costings.

3. Matching

Matching considerations before a child is placed within a foster family must consider: -

- the child's attitude/experience of pets, including cultural view of animals?
- Does the child have any mobility difficulties, known allergies or other health issues which might make it unsafe or unsuitable for them to be placed in a dog-owning household?
- any other risks, including the child's capacity to live in a household where there are pets. For example, is the child fearful of dogs; has the child been known to mistreat animals?
- Information should be shared with carers, in regard to any known risks from the child to animals. If there is a known risk to an animal from the child and these risks are felt be manageable, then direct work should be undertaken with the child and carers about promoting kind and safe care of pets. This will be incorporated into the safer care, pet assessment and be reviewed regularly, as part of the foster carers annual review.

4. Visiting Animals

It is important to note that where foster carers have friends/relatives with pets who visit their house, they must ensure that the child in placement is supervised and that good hygiene practices are followed.

5. Actions in the Event of Injury to a Child by a Pet

If a dog or other pet in the household bites, scratches or in any way injures a fostered child the foster carer must take the following actions immediately:

- Remove the animal from the house.

- Give the child first aid and seek medical advice/attention as soon as possible.
- Notify the Fostering Social Worker or Team Manager.
- Notify the child's Social Worker or Team Manager.
- If out of hours, the foster carer should contact the out of hours team or emergency duty team.

The pet assessment will need to be reviewed, with an expert opinion potentially sought.